

Additional Resources...to assist programmers in locating resources and information that help plan and implement Hearts N' Parks programs.

Appendix

Additional Resources

for your Hearts N' Parks program

The list below is intended to help you locate resources and information that may assist you with planning and implementing your Hearts N' Parks program. References to any nongovernmental entity, product, service, or source of information that may be contained in this list should not be considered an endorsement, either direct or implied, by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). NHLBI is not responsible for the content of any non-Federal Web pages referenced in this list. Furthermore, contact information listed is subject to change.

General and Heart Health Information	Type of information provided
<p>American Health Foundation 1 Dina Road Valhalla, NY 10595 Telephone: (212) 953-1900 Web: www.ahf.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancer prevention • Healthy eating • High fiber, low-fat diet • Cholesterol lowering
<p>American Heart Association** 7272 Greenville Avenue Dallas, TX 75231-4596 Telephone: (214) 373-6300 1-800-AHA-USA or (800) 242-8721 - locate regional affiliate (800) 553-6321 (Stroke Connection) Fax: (214) 706-2139 E-mail: inquire@amhrt.org Web: www.amhrt.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A-Z Guide for Heart and Stroke Information • Stroke prevention • Nutrition education, recipes, and meal ideas • Exercise (children and older adults) • Fundraising events
<p>American Lung Association** 61 Broadway, 6th Floor New York, NY 10006 Telephone: (212) 315-8700 (800) LUNGUSA or (800) 586-4872 - referral to local chapters Fax: (212) 265-5642 E-mail: info@lungusa.org Web: www.lungusa.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asthma, smoking, occupational health • School-based education program • Referral to local allergists and free patient education • Teen smoking
<p>Association of Worksite Health Promotion 60 Revere Drive Suite 500 Northbrook, IL 60062 Telephone: (847) 480-9574 Fax: (847) 480-9282 E-mail: awhp@awhp.org Web: www.awhp.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best-practices, methods, processes, and technologies • Publications

** Local or State Chapters exist

General and Heart Health Information	Type of information provided
<p>The American Academy of Pediatrics 141 Northwest Point Boulevard Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098 Telephone: (847) 228-5005 Fax: (847) 228-5097 Web: www.aap.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's health • <i>You and Your Family</i> health and nutrition brochures • Guide to organizing a health fair
<p>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1600 Clifton Road Atlanta, GA 30333 Telephone: (800) 311-3435 Web: www.cdc.gov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health topics A–Z • School-based nutrition and physical activity programs • Health statistics • Health topics in the news
<p>Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Public Health Services 5600 Fishers Lane, Room 14-05 Rockville, MD 20857 (301) 443-3376 Web: www.hrsa.gov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to healthcare, quality of care, and healthcare policy • Spanish material
<p>Heart Information Service Texas Heart Institute P.O. Box 20345, MCI-194 Houston, TX 77225-0345 Telephone: (713) 794-6630 or (800) 292-2221 Fax: (713) 794-3714 E-mail: his@biostl.thi.tmc.edu Web: www.tmc.edu/thi</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 800-number for questions relating to heart disease • Cardiovascular health • Heart-health quiz
<p>National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute P.O. Box 30105 Bethesda, MD 20824 Telephone: (301) 592-8573 Fax: (301) 592-8563 Web: www.nhlbi.nih.gov E-mail requests: NHLBIinfo@nhlbi.nih.gov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health information from trained information specialists • Asthma, sleep disorders, overweight, obesity, physical activity, cholesterol, heart disease, high blood pressure, and other heart, lung, and blood disorders
<p>National Institutes of Health (NIH) 9000 Rockville Pike Bethesda, Maryland 20892 Web: www.nih.gov/index.html</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A–Z subject guide including all the Institutes at NIH
<p>Wellness Council of America** 7101 Newport Avenue, Suite 311 Omaha, NE 68152 Telephone: (402) 572-3590 Fax: (402) 572-3594 Web: www.welcoa.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace and employee wellness programs • Local chapter in some States

**** Local or State Chapters exist**

Nutrition and Weight Loss	Type of Information Provided
<p>American Dietetic Association** 216 West Jackson Boulevard, Suite 800 Chicago, IL 60606-6995 Telephone: (312) 899-0040, (800) 877-1600 Web: www.eatright.org Consumer Nutrition Hotline (800) 366-1655</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition information for various age groups, diseases, and circumstances • Nutrition education • Nutrition hotline for nutrition information and to find a local dietitian
<p>Center for Science in the Public Interest Suite 300 1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20009-5728 Telephone: (202) 418-2312 Fax: (202) 208-2321 E-mail: cspi@cspinet.org Web: www.cspinet.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food safety • Nutrition • Kids nutrition Web site • Nutrition quizzes
<p>USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion U.S. Department of Agriculture North Lobby, Suite 200 1120 20th Street, NW Washington, DC 20036 Telephone: (202) 418-2312 Web: www.usda.gov/cnpp</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Nutrition Insights” newsletter on nutrition-related topics • <i>Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans</i> • Food Guide Pyramid • Information on nutrition policy
<p>Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service** Web: www.reeusda.gov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and education, including food and nutrition • State partners • Find an expert (such as home economists or food and nutrition specialists)
<p>Overeaters Anonymous** P.O. Box 44020 Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4020 Telephone: (505) 891-2664 Web: www.overeatersanonymous.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for compulsive overeaters
<p>TOPS Club, Inc.** Take Off Pounds Sensibly 4577 South 5th Street Milwaukee, WI 53207 Telephone: (414) 482-4620 (800) 932-8677 (chapter location) Web: www.tops.org/html/information.html</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight loss support groups
<p>Weight-control Information Network (WIN) 1 WIN Way Bethesda, MD 20892-3665 Telephone: (800) WIN-8098 Web: www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/win.htm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating disorders • Weight loss programs • Nutrition tips

** Local or State Chapters exist

Nutrition and Weight Loss	Type of Information provided
<p>Tufts University Nutrition Navigator Web: www.navigator.tufts.edu</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rating guide to nutrition Web sites • General nutrition, parents, women, kids, special dietary needs, journalists, health professionals, educators

Physical Activity and Sports	Type of Information Provided
<p>Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance 1900 Association Drive Reston, VA 20191 Telephone: (703) 476-3400 or (800) 213-7193 Web: www.aahperd.org/index.html Publications catalog (800) 321-0789</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical fitness programs for youth and adults • <i>Physical Best Activity Guides</i> (elementary and secondary levels) • Public advocacy to expand physical education programs for students
<p>American College of Sports Medicine P.O. Box 1440 Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440 Telephone: (317) 637-9200 or (800) 486-5643 Fax: (317) 634-7817 E-mail: pipascm@acsm.org Web: www.acsm.org/sportsmed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition and sports information (to order, free, not available on-line)
<p>Cooper Institute of Aerobic Research Web: www.cooperinst.org Health and nutrition tips: Web: www.cooperaerobics.com/index.htm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness and aerobic health • Physical fitness assessments • Worksite health promotion
<p>National Association for Health and Fitness 201 S. Capitol Ave., Suite 560 Indianapolis, IN 46225 Telephone: (317) 237-5630 Fax: (317) 237-5632 Web: www.physicalfitness.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity planning kits • Resource and product guide • 8-week program for adults to establish a more healthy and active lifestyle • Employee health and fitness
<p>National Association for Sport and Physical Education 1900 Association Drive Reston, VA 20191. Telephone: (703) 476-3410 Fax: (703) 476-8316 Web: www.aapherd.org/naspe/naspe-main.html Online Store: www.aapherd.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport and physical activity programs that promote healthy behaviors and individual well-being • Physical activity guidelines for pre-adolescent children and national standards for physical education curriculum

**** Local or State Chapters exist**

Physical Activity and Sports	Type of Information Provided
<p>National Recreation and Park Association** Belmont Ridge Road Ashburn, VA 20148 Telephone: (703) 858-0784 Fax: (703) 858-0794 E-mail: programs@nrpa.org Web: www.activeparks.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure and lifestyle • Links to programs focused on health, youth, and the environment • Find a park near you • Online events and calendar contact information for State affiliates
<p>President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports 200 Independence Avenue, SW Room 738H Washington, DC 20201 Telephone: (202) 690-9000 Web: www.surgeongeneral.gov/ophs/pcpfs.htm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of physical activity • Importance of physical activity • Youth fitness campaign

** Local or state chapters exist

Gateways/Clearinghouses for Health Information on the Internet	Type of Information Provided
<p>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web: www.cdc.gov/other.htm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information networks and other information sources • State and local health departments, public health partners
<p>Food and Nutrition Information Center U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Library 10301 Baltimore Boulevard, Room 304 Beltsville, MD 20705-2351 Telephone: (301) 504-5719 Web: www.nal.usda.gov/fnic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allergies, food safety, food and nutrition for all ages, pregnancy and breastfeeding, diabetes, body weight, cardiovascular disease, and nutritional and herbal supplements • Food Guide Pyramid • <i>Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans</i>
<p>Healthfinder® U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Web: www.healthfinder.gov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthfinder is a free gateway to reliable consumer health and human services information developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
<p>National Health Information Center Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion U.S. Department of Health and Human Services P.O. Box 1133 Washington, DC 20013 Telephone: (800) 336-4797 Web: nhic-nt.health.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Information Resource Database: 1,100 organizations and government offices that provide health information upon request

Gateways/Clearinghouses for Health Information on the Internet	Type of Information Provided
The National Women's Health Information Center Office on Women's Health Department of Health and Human Services Telephone: (800) 994-WOMAN (9662) Web: www.4woman.gov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gateway to health information and referral center for women • Heart health assessment • Media information • Women's health statistics

Local Professionals	Ask for the:
American Diabetes Association Web: www.diabetes.org	Diabetes educator
American Dietetic Association Web: www.eatright.org	Registered dietitian (800) 366-1655 Local chapter (800) 877-1600
Cooperative State Research, Education, Nutrition and Extension Service Web: www.reeusda.gov	Home economist or food and nutrition specialist
American Nurses Association Web: www.nursingworld.org/index.htm Telephone: (800) 274-4ANA (4262)	Registered nurse State nurses association
County Health Department	Health education consultant
Department of Public Health, Health Promotion Division	Public health nutritionist
Office of Health Education	Health educator

Media and Local Associations	Type of Information Provided
The National Association of Counties 440 First Street, NW Suite 800 Washington, DC 20001 Telephone: (202) 393-6226 Fax: (202) 393-2630 Web: www.naco.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for State association
National League of Cities 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20004-1763 Telephone: (202) 626-3000 Fax: (202) 626-3043 Web: www.nlc.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacts for State municipal leagues • Links to State, local, and Federal government resources on the World Wide Web

Media and Local Associations	Type of Information Provided
ABC Web: www.abc.go.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for local networks
NBC Web: www.nbc.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for local networks
CBS Web: www.cbs.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for local networks
Fox Network Web: www.foxnetwork.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for local networks

Other helpful contacts and ideas

- Local grocery stores or restaurants will often donate heart-healthy food for events.
- Hospitals will sometimes donate staff time and/or supplies for screenings, health fairs, etc. Call your State hospital association or search for it on the Web by searching for “[your State] hospital association.”
- Contact local newspapers and local TV stations for coverage of special events.



Health Statistics...to provide programmers with background health information on the burden of heart disease and associated risk factors within the community.

Appendix



Health Statistics

about Cardiovascular Disease



Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)

- Approximately 60.8 million people in the United States had some form of CVD in 1998.
- CVD includes such diseases as high blood pressure (hypertension), coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke, congestive heart failure, and rheumatic heart disease.
- Approximately 50 million people had hypertension and about 12 million people had CHD in 1998.
- CVD is the leading cause of death in the United States, contributing to 949,000 deaths in 1998. The estimated total economic cost of CVD is expected to be \$298 billion in 2001; \$182 billion is expected to be in direct health expenditures.

Source: *NHLBI FY 2000 Fact Book*

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

- Approximately 50 million adults in the United States had hypertension in 1997.
- Hypertension is a major risk factor for heart disease.
- High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer” since a large number of people are unaware that they have it and may not have symptoms.



- High blood pressure is more common in older persons, in African Americans, overweight persons, and those with a family history of high blood pressure.
- Lifestyle changes, such as engaging in physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, limiting alcohol, and following a heart-healthy diet can help prevent or control hypertension.

Source: *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*

Cholesterol

- High blood cholesterol is a major risk for CVD.
- More than 90 million adults in the United States have blood cholesterol levels that are higher than desirable.
- More than 50 million adults in the United States have blood cholesterol levels that require medical intervention.
- Lifestyle changes, such as increasing physical activity, reducing excess weight, and following a heart-healthy eating diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol can prevent or lower high blood cholesterol.

Source: *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*

Overweight and Obesity

- Approximately 97 million people (55 percent of the American adult population) are overweight or obese.
- One in five children over the age of 6 is considered overweight or obese.
- Overweight and obesity are risk factors for CVD and other diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, gall bladder disease, sleep apnea, as well as some types of cancer.
- Obesity acquired during childhood or adolescence may persist into adulthood and increase the risk for CVD and other diseases later in life.
- Lifestyle changes, such as increasing physical activity, behavior modification, and following a heart-healthy eating plan can help with weight loss and maintenance.

Source: *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*

Physical Activity

- Physical inactivity increases the risk of heart disease.
- Moderate, regular physical activity for 30 minutes on most days of the week can reduce the risk for many diseases, including heart disease.
- Regular physical activity enhances the quality of life for people of all ages and helps to maintain the functional independence of older adults.
- Currently, 23 percent of adults report regular, vigorous physical activity for 20 minutes or longer 3 or more days per week.
- Approximately 15 percent of adults report moderate physical activity for 5 or more days per week for 30 minutes or longer.
- Approximately 27 percent of adolescents in grades 9 through 12 engage in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes for 5 or more days.

Source: *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*

Smoking

- Cigarette smoking causes heart disease as well as several types of cancer, and chronic lung disease.
- Secondhand smoke exposure causes heart disease in adults.
- Tobacco is responsible for more than 430,000 adult deaths per year in the United States.
- Tobacco use and addiction usually begin in adolescence, and have increased in the 1990s.

Source: *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*

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Background Sheets...to provide programmers with reproducible background sheets on what Hearts N' Parks is all about, as well as one on *Eat Right for a Healthy Heart* and one on *Get Moving for a Healthy Heart*.

Appendix



About Hearts N' Parks



Hearts N' Parks is a national, community-based program supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). This innovative program aims to reduce the growing trend of obesity and the risk of coronary heart disease in the United States by encouraging Americans of all ages to aim for a healthy weight, follow a heart-healthy eating plan, and engage in regular physical activity.

Why are these goals important?

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Overweight and obesity increase one's risk of developing heart disease.
- The numbers of overweight children and adolescents, as well as obese adults, in the United States have doubled over the past 2 decades. Approximately 97 million American adults—or 55 percent—are currently overweight or obese. In addition, one in five children over the age of 6 is considered overweight, and overweight and obesity acquired during childhood or adolescence may persist into adulthood and increase the risk for some chronic diseases later in life. In addition to being more likely to develop heart disease and stroke than individuals with healthy weights, overweight and obese individuals are at increased risk for diabetes, cancer, gallbladder disease, sleep apnea and other respiratory problems, osteoarthritis, and other conditions.
- Adopting heart-healthy behaviors, such as following a healthy eating plan and participating in regular physical activity, can help individuals achieve or maintain a healthy weight. Even modest amounts of weight loss of approximately 10 percent of initial body weight can reduce high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol levels, and high blood glucose levels in overweight or obese

individuals with high levels. Reducing these risk factors helps to prevent cardiovascular disease and/or reduce its severity in those with existing disease.

Through Hearts N' Parks, science-based information about lifestyle choices that can reduce an individual's risk of heart disease and skills for incorporating heart healthy behaviors into one's life are taught as part of the regular activities offered by park and recreation departments and other community-based agencies. The program also provides tools for measuring the impact of these activities.

Hearts N' Parks also demonstrates the impact that community park and recreation programs can have on helping people improve and maintain their health. According to NRPA, 75 percent of Americans live within a 2-mile walking distance of a public park. These facilities are widely accessible to individuals from culturally and socioeconomically diverse populations, as well as to individuals with disabilities.

Key elements and benefits of Hearts N' Parks include:

- Hearts N' Parks activities can be incorporated into a variety of programs - nutrition and fitness activities, stress reduction or family life programs, etc. Activities can be adapted for children, youth, adults and seniors.
- Recreation and park departments and other community organizations receive staff training and resources to integrate heart-healthy activities into existing activities or to develop new activities.

Hearts N' Parks is fun and flexible. Each community agency can adapt the program material to its own design, abilities, and needs.



- Consumer-oriented materials are available to communicate heart-healthy messages related to weight management, physical activity, high blood pressure, cholesterol, and heart disease. In addition, materials targeted to specific populations, such as African Americans and Hispanics, are also available.

- Evaluation materials to measure the program's impact are included.
- Hearts N' Parks provides opportunities for community organizations to gain public recognition of their commitment to encouraging healthy behaviors, as well as to develop partnerships to further enrich their activities.

Hearts N' Parks was piloted during the summer of 1999 in 33 sites in 12 North Carolina communities involving more than 2,000 participants. An evaluation showed that participants retained information about heart-healthy behaviors and intended to eat healthier. In addition, children reported learning new physical activities and improving their performance in others; seniors reported feeling healthier and experiencing less pain in their daily lives by the end of the program.

Hearts N' Parks is fun and flexible. Each community agency can adapt the program material to its own design, abilities, and needs. And it's for everybody—participants can be young or old, active or non-active. Community organizations interested in signing up to become a Hearts N' Parks community should contact the National Recreation and Park Association at programs@nrpa.org or 1-800-649-3042.





Eat Right for a Healthy Heart



Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Fortunately, though, there are things you can do to protect yourself and your family against heart disease.

For example, following an eating plan that balances calorie intake with your level of physical activity and is low in saturated and total fat, and cholesterol, and rich in fruits and vegetables, lowfat dairy foods, and whole grains, can help protect you against high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and overweight—factors that, along with physical inactivity and smoking, increase the risk of heart disease.

This eating plan may also help prevent cancer and other health problems.

The earlier you take action, the better. Research shows that heart disease begins early in life and that, once learned, bad habits are hard to break. So you and your family should adopt a heart-healthy eating plan now.

Here's some advice about heart-healthy eating from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA):

- Balancing the calories in the foods you eat with the calories your body uses in physical activity is key to maintaining a healthy body weight, or even to losing weight if you are overweight. Being overweight increases your risk of developing high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, and other serious diseases or conditions.
- The kinds and amounts of foods you eat can affect your ability to maintain weight. High-fat foods contain more calories per serving than other foods and increase the likelihood of weight gain. However, even when people eat less high-fat food, they still can gain weight from eating too much of foods high in starch, sugars, or proteins.
- Healthy people over age 2 should consume less than 10 percent of the day's total calories from saturated fat; no more than 30 percent of total calories from fat; and less than 300 milligrams of dietary cholesterol per day.
- Saturated fat raises cholesterol in the blood more than anything else eaten. Saturated fat is found mainly in animal foods. One way to cut down is to switch to lower-fat foods, including





Special Tips for Kids and Seniors

low-fat or fat-free dairy products and to remove skin from poultry.

- Cholesterol in the diet also can raise blood cholesterol. It is found only in foods from animals. Meat and poultry have similar amounts. Since eggs are especially high in cholesterol, limit intake to four eggs per week.
- Unsaturated fat does not raise blood cholesterol but can add calories. Be careful of extra calories when trying to lose weight.
- Another key to healthy eating is choosing foods lower in salt and sodium, which can affect blood pressure. Have no more than 2,400 mg of sodium a day—equal to about one teaspoon of table salt. This includes salt used in cooking. Instead, season food with herbs and spices. Also, snack on unsalted pretzels, popcorn without salt or butter, and crackers or fruits.
- Having an adequate intake of vitamins and minerals, especially potassium, calcium, and magnesium, also is important for lowering blood pressure.
- Limit alcohol, since it supplies calories but few or no nutrients—for example, no more than two 12-ounce beers in a day for men and one for women.
- To help you follow a heart-healthy eating plan, read food labels to choose foods that are lower in calories, total fat, saturated fat, and sodium.



American children are gaining weight. They are eating too many calories from high-calorie fast- and snack foods and not getting enough physical activity. Try cutting back on high-fat foods for your children by offering more fruits as snacks. Vegetables can be chopped into small

pieces and added to favorite recipes without kids noticing. Combine rice with vegetables. Whole wheat or bran breads add fiber to sandwiches. For desserts, offer fig bars, ginger snaps, graham crackers, or frozen fat-free dairy desserts.

Children often eat many meals away from home, making it harder to maintain good eating habits. To improve fast-food meals, order a small plain hamburger—it has less fat than fried or battered items—and hold the cheese or special sauce. Or, try lean roast beef and grilled or broiled chicken sandwiches or pita pockets with small pieces of meat and vegetables.

Seniors need to be diet-smart too. Maintaining a healthy body weight is important for older people, since we begin to lose weight as we age. Some weight may be lost from muscle, so be sure that your diet is rich in protein and carbohydrates, while watching out for too many saturated fats.

A collage of sports-related items: a baseball in the top left, a sneaker in the top right, and a basketball in the bottom right. A circular inset image of a tennis ball is positioned between the main text columns.

Get moving for a healthy heart

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Fortunately, though, you can take steps to reduce your risk of heart disease. For example, getting regular physical activity can help protect you and your family against high blood pressure and overweight and obesity—factors that, along with high blood cholesterol and smoking, increase the risk of heart disease.

Staying active also helps keep off extra pounds, control blood pressure, boost the level of “good” HDL-cholesterol, and prevent diabetes and heart attacks. It also strengthens the lungs, tones the muscles, keeps the joints in good condition, improves balance, helps prevent and treat depression, and helps many people cope better with stress and anxiety.

If you already have heart disease, regular, moderate physical activity lowers your risk of death from heart-related causes. (However, if you have heart disease, check with your doctor first to find out what kinds of activities are best for you.)

The earlier you start, the better. The best time to start learning heart-healthy habits is in childhood, because heart disease risk factors start developing then too. Still, it’s never too late to begin living heart-healthy. This is true even for people in their ‘80s and ‘90s.

Here’s some advice about physical activity from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA):

- To reap benefits from physical activity, you don’t need to train for a marathon. You need

to engage in only about 30 minutes of moderate-level activity on most—and preferably all—days of the week. A moderate-level activity is one that’s about as demanding as brisk walking.

- Other examples of moderate physical activity that can improve heart health are bicycling, conditioning or general calisthenics, racquet sports (such as table tennis), jogging, swimming, dancing, housework, gardening, or lawn mowing.
- You can engage in any of these activities for 30 minutes at one time, or you can do them in shorter periods of at least 10 minutes each, as long as you total approximately 30 minutes each day.
- If you are already engaging in this level of physical activity, you will receive extra health and fitness benefits by doing these activities for a longer period each day or becoming involved in more vigorous activity.

Special Tips for Kids, Adults, and Seniors:

Young people should be physically active—both in and out of school. Instead of television, video games and the computer, kids need to be engaged in “active play,” such as tag, jump rope, hide and seek, or bicycling, or team activities like soccer, basketball, and softball.

Another way to increase children’s activity levels is to get them involved in everyday activities, like household chores, walking the dog, or helping with the groceries.

Take the time to be physically active as a family. This not only provides health benefits for the entire family but can be an important time to get to know each other better. Young kids particularly enjoy being involved in family fun, such as shooting hoops with dad or playing tennis with mom.



Adults who have not been active for a while should start slowly, gradually building up to the recommended 30 minutes per day of moderate-level activity. For example, if you want to begin walking regularly, you might begin with a 10–15-minute walk three times a week. As you become more fit, you can increase the sessions to every day and gradually lengthen each walking session or increase your pace. Some adults should get medical advice before starting a program of physical activity. Consult your doctor first if you:

- Have heart trouble or have had a heart attack;
- Are taking medicine for high blood pressure or a heart condition;

- Are over 50 years old and not used to moderately energetic activity;
- Have someone in your family who developed heart disease at an early age.

Seniors also need regular physical activity. Regular physical activity is good for your heart, mood, muscles, and arteries, and improves your bones

and ability to sleep well. It builds strength, promotes coordination and balance, and helps slow bone loss and prevent fractures from osteoporosis.

Many older people think they are too old or too frail to exercise. Nothing could be further from the truth. Physical activity of any kind—from heavy-duty exercise, such as jogging or bicycling, to easier efforts like walking—is good for you.

Older people who become more active—including those with medical problems—may feel better and have more energy. Being active is also an easy way to share some time with friends or family, as well as to meet new friends.

Keys to Success

- Go slow. If you have not been physically active until now, gradually build up to the recommended 30 minutes per day of moderate-level activity.
- Begin each workout slowly. Allow a 5-minute period of stretching and slow movement to “warm up” and 5 minutes at the end to “cool down” at a slower pace.
- Listen to your body. A certain amount of stiffness is normal at first. But if you hurt a joint or pull a muscle or tendon, stop the activity for several days to avoid more serious injury.
- Pay attention to warning signals. Some types of physical activity may worsen heart problems. Warning signals include sudden dizziness, cold sweat, paleness, fainting, or pain or pressure in your upper body or chest during—or just after—physical activity. If you notice any of these signs, stop and call your doctor immediately.
- Check the weather. Dress appropriately for hot, humid days and for cold days, and drink lots of water before, during, and after activity.
- Keep at it. Unless you have to stop your activity for a health reason, stay with it. Set small, short-term goals for yourself. If you find yourself becoming bored, try doing the activity with a friend or family member. Or switch to another activity.